



National Human Rights Defense Network (RNDDH)

Riot at the National Penitentiary Results in More Violence

Summary of Press Statement

15 May 2006

The National Human Rights Defense Network (RNDDH) is appalled to learn of yet another violent uprising by inmates at the country's largest prison facility, the National Penitentiary in Port-au-Prince. Early on Sunday, 14 May 2006, Inauguration Day of recently elected President Rene Prével, inmates broke through their cells gates, smashing the locks, and allegedly setting fire to cells in attempts to break out of the prison. One day after the incident, partial information regarding the incident suggests at least forty (40) inmates were injured, five (5) severely. Injuries include broken bones and gunshot wounds, among others. Additionally, it is reported that at least three (3) prison officers were also injured during the riot.

RNDDH strongly criticizes the blatant neglect of Haitian authorities to take precautionary measures to secure the prison prior to Inauguration Day in order to avoid such a situation, despite being aware several days in advance of rumors forecasting potential problems.

This is not the first time that such a situation has developed within this prison as a number of similar incidents have been recorded between 29 February 2004 and the present. On 1 December 2004, mutiny among the inmates of the National Penitentiary resulted in the deaths of ten (10) inmates and the wounding of forty-six (46) others – 17 of whom had been shot. Six (6) prison officers were also injured. Extensive structural damage was incurred during the riot as eight (8) cells had been set ablaze. No measures were taken to avoid future violent and uprising, and no disciplinary measures were taken against the officers responsible for the mistreatment and killing of several inmates.

Just over two (2) months later, on 19 February 2005, armed individuals, together with the complicity of several prison officers, attacked the prison. The result: one (1) prison officer shot dead and four hundred and eighty-one (481) prisoners freed.

Today, the tension in the prison remains high. An initial attempt by an RNDDH delegation to visit the prison and document the damage was unsuccessful.

The State must recognize and accept that when an individual is detained within one of the country's prison facilities, the State is responsible to ensure his/her well-being and take every appropriate measure to ensure the protection and guarantee of his/her fundamental human rights.

Given the gravity of Sunday's riot and previous incidents, RNDDH strongly recommends that the Haitian Prison Authority do everything possible to adequately reinforce its prison officers with sufficient and appropriate resources to perform their duties in operating prison facilities and rehabilitating inmates. A firearm should not be a prison officer's first line of defense. It is

imperative that officers are provided with other methods of crowd control and defense, such as high pressure water hoses, tear gas, shields etc. It is the responsibility of the State to provide such resources.

Additionally, judicial authorities must acknowledge their responsibility for the serious situation of extended pre-trial detention within the National Penitentiary where one thousand seven hundred and twenty-nine (1,729) inmates are still awaiting trial.

The country's penitentiary system is in shambles and a plan needs to be developed with regards to its long-term, sustainable reform. In the case of 14 May 2006, RNDDH recommends that an independent commission be established with the purpose of fully investigating the riot, identifying the root problems, and proposing appropriate measures and action to be taken to prevent future violence.

RNDDH will continue to exhaust all efforts in order to carry out a full investigation into this incident.